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Letter dated 24 September 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to request that the attached letter from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, addressed to Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, concerning the **Human Development Report 2002** (see annex) be circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 88 entitled "Operational activities for development".

(*Signed*) Bruno **Rodriguez Parrilla**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 24 September 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you in connection with the **Human Development Report 2002**, the contents of which have just come to our attention and concerning which, unfortunately, we have serious objections, including concerning the methodology used to produce it.

I have decided to bring this matter to your attention because, while the report is supposed to be independent, it is in fact the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that promotes, publishes and funds it and that launches and disseminates it internationally.

As you know, the Cuban authorities attach great value to the annual **Human Development Report**, which is a valuable source of information for United Nations Member States, many institutions, agencies and bodies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and the public at large. As a result, one would expect the contents of the reports to be supported by reliable, objective and impartial information. Cuba believes, for reasons that I explain to you at length in this letter, that the authors of the latest report unfortunately erred in that regard.

Last year, as you will recall, we had problems with the report because it did not include information for Cuba on the very important issue of science and technology, two areas in which our country has made considerable strides and has achieved important, internationally recognized, results. Curiously, the latest report only includes information on the poverty index in Cuba.

This year, the report's overall theme is democracy. The authors faced a tremendous challenge in tackling such a controversial issue, one that has been debated since the dawn of modern civilization. One might therefore have expected greater tact and care and, above all, greater scientific rigour and political discernment. The report takes a different course, however. Cuba disagrees sharply with its approaches and parameters, and I therefore feel bound to express to you very clearly our reservations concerning the information included in the report, as well as my Government's readiness to raise the issue in all forums and bodies where this is appropriate and feasible.

The report presents so-called "subjective indicators" which, as their name suggests, are completely lacking in objectivity. It is impossible to quantify democracy, governance and human rights, unless the intention is simply to list the international instruments to which each country is a party, for instance, or similar parameters. Besides no precise, duly agreed definition or single, internationally accepted, model exists, and no indicators have been established at the intergovernmental level in the framework of the United Nations, as the report of the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (E/CN.3.2002/27) clearly indicates.

The design and drafting of the report reflect the discourse that certain countries have sought to uphold at the United Nations and in some of its organs in an attempt to impose as a universal paradigm a model of "democracy" that they themselves have defined, conveniently overlooking the principles of diversity and self-determination, the latter as defined by the Charter.

The report also conveys a restrictive approach to "democracy" by limiting it exclusively to civil and political aspects and ignoring economic, social and cultural aspects, as well as collective rights essential for the exercise of genuine democracy. There is more than one model of democracy and none can be considered superior to the rest and there is no such thing as a perfect, universally accepted democracy. Such an idea is selective, discriminatory and partial and therefore entirely lacking in objectivity and legitimacy.

Moreover, this restrictive approach takes no account of universally accepted principles such as that contained in part I, paragraph 8, of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (see A/CONF.157/23), which states that "democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives". Nor does it consider such important principles as the need to bear in mind national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.

My country is also deeply concerned about the nature of the reference sources used in the report. Neither the World Bank nor the University of Maryland, much less the organization Freedom House and so-called "in-hours experts", are institutions whose membership is universal. Accordingly, it is unjustified and, to say the least, unacceptable to adopt their criteria and methodologies as yardsticks for attempting to "measure" all countries.

Cuba, for instance, is not a member of the World Bank, for reasons that are well known to you. One might therefore ask what data or genuinely reliable information that institution can provide on my country.

Freedom House, for its part, is an organization on which there is no international consensus and whose activities and credibility have been strongly questioned by a number of United Nations Member States. It claims to be a non-governmental organization, when its structure, funding and activities are those of an agency of the United States Government and its special services. It should be recalled that, in 1995, the United Nations Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations raised objections to the organization's consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and it is no secret that its publication **Freedom in the World** is partial and discriminates against the countries of the South. That publication lacks all legitimacy and yet it has been used as a basis for determining some of the "indicators" used in the **Human Development Report** presented by UNDP this year.

It should also be recalled that Freedom House has acknowledged on more than one occasion that it receives funding from the United States Government for the purpose of destabilizing my country, engaging in anti-Cuban propaganda and smuggling agents into Cuba, some of whom have been discovered and duly denounced.

In addition, the report is selective when it comes to considering the status of ratification of human rights instruments, in that it refers to only two such instruments, more specifically those focusing on civil and political rights. In Cuba's case, for instance, it ignores the fact that our country is a party to 16 human rights instruments, including such important instruments as the Convention on the Rights

of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Such selectivity undermines important, internationally recognized principles reaffirming that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent, and it also ignores the wide range of instruments existing in this area which together make up the international system for the protection of human rights.

Because of the importance generally attached to the **Human Development Report** and the excellent relations that traditionally have existed between UNDP and the Cuban authorities, I wish to request that, with a view to preserving the necessary objectivity, universality and rigour that must characterize the report, the views set forth above be given due consideration. The theme of a report of this kind cannot be chosen without taking into account the availability of, or the possibility of obtaining, the data and the objective, quantifiable information that are required. Moreover, it is essential to consult universal, reliable, recognized and impartial sources, preferably those of the United Nations system.

Cuba, I repeat, finds the use of Freedom House as a reference source particularly unacceptable, given that that organization serves and promotes the foreign policy interest of the United States, a country that has maintained an aggressive, hostile policy towards Cuba for over 40 years.

My Government believes that, given the sensitivity and vital importance of this matter, the competent intergovernmental organs, such as the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, the Statistical Commission and the UNDP Executive Board, should take a position on the issue. Cuba's delegations to their respective meetings will be prepared to contribute to the corresponding exchange of views.

I should like to inform you that Cuba will, at the proper time, transmit these views to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, not only for consideration and evaluation but also for publication as a document of the Organization.

(*Signed*) Felipe **Pérez Roque**